

POPE AND MUSSOLINI

(By Dr. J. J. Murphy, Associate-Editor of *The Converted Catholic*, 229 West 48th St., New York City. This paper is edited wholly by converted Roman Catholic Priests, thoroughly conversant with all the machinations of Rome; and no Protestant can afford to be without the information it contains. Write the above address for sample copy and subscription rate.)

Three years ago, Fascism seemed triumphant and the Vatican rejoiced. France had fallen, Protestant England had its back against the wall, "decadent" democracy seemed doomed and all of Europe lay at the feet of the Nazi-Fascist dictators. Contrary even to our expectations, the Papacy's pact with Fascism began to seem the wisest stroke of policy for the Catholic church since the Reformation. But now all that is changed. Fascism has crumbled, and the Pope, ruefully surveying the ruins of bombed Rome, bemoans the policy that tied his church to Mussolini's régime.

It is timely, therefore, to recall the facts connected with that fatal tie-up between the Pope and Mussolini, in the following article:

AFTER THE First World War not one, but two autocratic dictators seized the reins of power in Italy, Benito Mussolini in the State, Achille Ratti as Pope Pius XI in the Church. They had a common end: the destruction of the liberal idea of the 19th century and the restoration of authoritarian rule in State and Church. The German Catholic historian Karl Boka¹ succinctly summarizes Pope Pius XI's part in this dual plan as follows:

At this decisive moment the Pope seized the reins and took into his hands the unified control of all fields of endeavor in which his predecessors had distinguished themselves. This was the beginning of *Catholic Action* of far-reaching importance, of the entrance of the church into the fight into the battle for moral and religious renovation, and for the reform of social institutions. And this intervention had for its end the destruction of the liberal spirit of the 19th century.

Achille Ratti, better known as Pope Pius XI, from his youth was stern, strong-willed, ambitious and self-assured. William Teeling, a devout Irish Catholic who knew him personally, described his face as "rather hard and extremely practical." He characterized him even more strikingly when he said that "the present Pope Pius XI, as many an Italian who ought to know can tell you, is far more of a Mussolini and an autocratic dictator than is Mussolini himself."²

Msgr. Ratti, early reflected the strong Jesuit influence of his seminary days by particularly devoting himself to the study of the counter-Reformation. What the counter-Reformation still stands for has been tersely put as follows: "It sees decay and error and pestilence in everything that has been gained since the Protestant Reformation and the French Revolution, including the Declaration of the Rights of Man, the Bill of Rights, equal suffrage, the non-sectarian school—in fact, all democratic institutions."³

As Pope Pius XI, Achille Ratti modernized the counter-Reformation by centralizing all the power of the worldwide church in his own hands. Then, with the help of the Jesuits, he entered into deals with the Fascist leaders for the destruction of democratic liberalism and the

restoration of medieval authoritarianism. *Catholic Action*, a Catholic international political army on the style of the Russian Comintern, and *Quadragesimo Anno*, an economic and labor charter for Catholic Fascist states, were the tools he forged to implement the plan.

Early Diplomatic Experience

The first political assignment of Msgr. Ratti was to Poland to win back that country to the Roman Catholic church. By personal aggressiveness and close cooperation with wealthy Polish landowners he succeeded in getting Poland to accept a Constitution that differed little from that of 1791; it assured, among other things, a virtual monopoly for Catholicism and returned to the church its vast property holdings. He was tremendously impressed by his success. *It opened his eyes to the fact that by close cooperation with powerful reactionaries the Catholic church could re-establish itself as a power throughout Europe.*

While in Warsaw Msgr. Ratti had witnessed Bolshevik armies sweep on to the very gates of the city. He was struck with a realization that the one force that threatened all dreams of Catholic domination was Communism. He conceived for it a hatred equal to his passion to restore the church to its medieval power. At the same time he saw in this new born hatred a priceless opportunity to rally all Europe around the Roman church as the champion of "law and order," and a saving bulwark against Bolshevism. As the years went on his hatred of Communism became a veritable obsession.

Cooperation With Mussolini

On his return to Italy in 1921 where he was made archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Ratti immediately began working on his plan for Catholic Restoration by winning his beloved Italy back to the Catholic faith. This task appeared to him especially urgent, since socialism was becoming extremely active in Milan in organizing workers against the exploitation of a few rich industrialists. He hated socialism almost as much as Communism, considering them the twin offspring of Liberalism, the basic enemy of the church. He worked strenuously against socialism in Milan and played into the industrialists' hands by forbidding strikes.

Meanwhile, Benito Mussolini, backed by recent bribes from the industrialists, was busy using his former socialist reputation to organize Fascism in northern Italy, with headquarters in Milan. Cardinal Ratti had unexcelled opportunities for studying Mussolini and Fascism at first hand. He was aware of the strong anti-Clerical sentiment of many individual Fascists, but as Teeling remarked (p. 75): "Cardinal Ratti did not himself feel that agreement was impossible, nor probably did Signor Mussolini, but the ordinary man in the street felt that if both sides adhered to the doctrines they preached in public, there would never be a compromise."

But beneath the surface there were deeper convictions which they shared in common. Van Paassen puts it this way in his book, *That Day Alone*, p. 460:

"Upon his appointment to the archbishopric of Milan,

¹*Staat und Partei*, p. 75.

²*The Pope in Politics* by Wm. Teeling, an Irish journalist, nephew of a former Privy Chamberlain, p. 28.

³*Days of Our Years* by Pierre van Paassen, p. 539. All the quotations in this article from van Paassen are from this book, unless otherwise noted.

which was the center of the Fascist movement, Archbishop Ratti made the acquaintance of the leader of that movement, Signor Mussolini, and recognized in him the incorporation not only of anti-Bolshevik but of anti-democratic sentiments as well. . . . Mussolini's offer to recognize the Church as an ally in the fight was not turned down. When, at the inauguration of the monument to the Unknown Soldier in Milan cathedral, Mussolini asked if he could bring his blackshirts into the *Duomo*, Archbishop Ratti not only acceded to the request but saw to it that this band of notorious assassins occupied the seats of honor."

Pope And Duce Get Together

Shortly afterwards, Cardinal Ratti was elected Pope. The Jesuits, sensing that the time was ripe for the climaxing of their counter-Reformation, decided that Cardinal Ratti, their pupil and protégé, was their man. Teeling confirms Ratti's foreknowledge of his election to the Papacy when he says (p. 76): "From several of his statements I cannot help but feel that he himself thought it highly probable."

It is equally probable that Ratti and Mussolini reached an agreement before the former went to Rome for his election. This explains Pius' shattering of a 60-year-old precedent, a few minutes after his election, when he went out on the balcony of St. Peter's to give his blessing "to the City and the World" as a gesture of conciliation to Italy. It likewise explains Mussolini's delay in marching on Rome until Pius XI was well settled in office.

In 1922 Pius XI was crowned pope by Jesuit Cardinal Billot with a tiara that cost 1,500,000 lire. When a few months later Il Duce made his celebrated March on Rome, Pius XI felt greatly relieved. A period of anxious waiting had finally ended. We are informed by van Paassen (p. 187) that: Monsignor Gerlach told me in a confidential mood the night following the Duce's arrival in Rome that the Holy Father slept in peace for the first time in many months."

Teeling remarked (p. 114) that Pius XI was "convinced that Mussolini was the only man at that time in Europe with a sufficiently active policy to be able to fight the Bolshevism that he dreaded so much. . . ." This conviction of Pius never changed. Cardinal Gasparri, speaking as Pius' personal representative at the Eucharistic Congress in Sulmona, Italy, shortly before the election of Hitler, said:

"The Fascist Government of Italy is the only exception to the political anarchy of governments, parliaments and schools the world over."

Mussolini, for his part, was confident from the beginning of the church's support and solicitude for his success. In return, previous to his march on Rome, he issued a special decree safeguarding church property. A few months after his establishment in Rome he had his marriage blessed by a priest and his children baptized. He set up a crucifix in every school room as a symbol of Roman Catholicism. To use van Paassen's words (p. 188), "he was kissing the relics of dead saints like any other Sicilian peasant and was currently referred to in the sermons of the Roman clergy as a man of God."

From the beginning Mussolini expressed in action the

enthusiasm for Catholicism that he later put into words: "I wish to see religion everywhere in the country. Let us teach the children their catechism."

Il Duce was, as Teeling says (p. 120), "certain that the Catholic Church is there to help him in his work." This increased his zeal to get rid of anti-Clericalism and Freemasonry. The Catholic *Tablet* of London in 1923 grew eloquent over his benevolence to the church; in the words of the Bishop of Lombardy, he had brought about "the Catholic Awakening."

In the early days of Fascism there were still outbreaks of anti-Clericalism—some from members of the Fascisti. Pius XI protested as a matter of course Teeling remarked (p. 115): "Mussolini replied that he must be given time to control the enthusiasm of all his supporters. He never even once showed any feeling that he sympathized with them. He made many overtures to the Church. . . ."

The main source of discord between Fascism and the church, during the early days of Mussolini's government, was the political power of the Catholic *Popular Party*, led by the liberal-minded priest, Don Luigi Sturzo. The Fascists "realized that the only party too powerful for them in Italy was the *Popular Party*, which was essentially Catholic." Pius XI did not like the *Popular Party*, the more so since it had endorsed individual liberty at its last convention. In fact, he had no regard for democracy or the political parties on which it is founded, as he showed by ignoring all mention of them in his encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, the charter of the ideal Catholic state. However, he restrained his impetuosity, knowing that his power over the *Popular Party* was his best bargaining point in a planned-on deal with Mussolini. Though he could have prevented Fascism from becoming a dictatorship by backing the *Populari*, he had no intention of doing so. It was not long before he agreed with Mussolini to dissolve the *Popular Party* in order to stabilize Fascism. Don Sturzo was forced to hand in his resignation to Pius on June 9, 1923, and to go into exile.

The Lateran Accord

The Lateran Treaty and Concordat with Mussolini consummated the union between the Vatican and Fascism. The Roman Question could have been settled decades before, if the Vatican had been willing to do business with a democracy—but it wasn't. Speaking of the days preceding Fascism, Teeling (p. 113) says: "Since Italy was a democracy, the situation appeared helpless."

The Vatican gained practically nothing by the Lateran Accord that it had not been offered by Italy's parliamentary régime and its Laws of Guarantees of May 13, 1871. These laws granted the Roman Pontiff extra-territoriality, personal inviolability, royal privileges, a diplomatic court, a personal army, a Vatican City government and 3,225,000 lire a year. But the Vatican refused to relinquish its territorial claims to the Papal States and quibbled over a theoretical sovereignty. It refused to do business on Cavour's democratic ideal of "a free Church in a free State," declared the king and his successors ex-communicated and made the Pope "the prisoner of the Vatican"—until democracy was liquidated and Fascism well established under Dictator Mus-

*Reported in the London *Daily Herald*, Sept. 15, 1932.

*Reported in the Manchester *Guardian*, June 19, 1931.
*Teeling, *Wm.*, op. cit., p. 104.

solini. Then the Pope gave up all territorial claims—save to the 100 acres of the Vatican proper—and accepted practically the same conditions as mentioned above, plus a theoretical sovereignty. This "sovereignty" could give the Vatican no real independence; it was a juridical figment that left the Vatican as much as ever at the mercy of the State within whose borders it occupied a strategic corner. What is more, this theoretical sovereignty was guaranteed by no nation, except Fascist Italy.

The Lateran Concordat was a triumph for Fascism. It gave it papal endorsement and partnership with the church. Pius XI would have made the Lateran agreement much sooner, but it was to his advantage to wait. He held out until the anti-Clericals were liquidated and Fascism firmly established. The interim he used to jockey for points of vantage. By 1926 the time seemed ripe. "The initiative for a reconciliation had its origin in the Vatican. Signor Marone, State Councillor, was questioned by a Vatican monsignor as to the possibility of opening a discussion for the solution of the Roman question. But a little later Mussolini was informed of the request of the Holy See that the negotiation should appear to come from the Italian Government."

Negotiations for the partnership with Fascism could not go fast enough to please the Vatican. All bars were down—it was ready to meet all reasonable demands without the slightest delay. Seldom has Rome acted with such alacrity. Senator Morello in his book *Il Confitto dopo la Conciliazione* (p. 62) said of Cardinal Gasparri, papal Secretary of State: "The man is over-anxious; he is in a hurry. He wants to arrive as soon as possible."

By the Concordat with Mussolini the Catholic church became the National Church of Italy with countless special privileges of State protection for the clergy, religious orders, Catholic education in all schools and other church policies. In return, no Italian bishop politically unacceptable to Mussolini was appointed. All bishops took this oath to the Fascist State:

"I swear and promise neither to join in any agreement nor to be present at any meeting which may injure the Italian State and public order, and that I will not permit my clergy to do so. Taking heed for the good and interest of the Italian State, I will seek to avoid any harm that may threaten it."

In 1931 the natural rivalry of Church and State for supreme mastery broke into an open quarrel between Pius XI and Mussolini. Pius issued an encyclical letter, *Non abbiamo bisogno*, characterized by well-known Italian bombast. It attacked theoretical Fascism. After much fanfare Pius XI directly reversed himself a few months later by entering a closer understanding than before with the Duce, conceding him practically everything he asked for. This was their last love quarrel. As van Paassen puts it (p. 463): "after 1931 little more was heard of friction between the two, a circumstance that would tend to show that there has since been a progressive Vaticanization of Italy as well as a Fascistization of the Vatican."

A Perfect Partnership

By Enclosure IV of the Lateran Treaty Pius XI took

¹*Le Traités de Latran* by Christian Mouchet, Paris, 1931.

²*The Relation of Church and State in Modern Italy* by Emmanuele Santi, p. 22.

1,000,000,000 lire's worth of Fascist Government stock, with an agreement that he would not sell it for a specified number of years, plus 750 million lire in cash. This sealed his subjection to Mussolini. Even Irish Catholic Teeling admitted plaintively:

"Before writing this book I tried to take the view that a Pope would not be influenced in his political activities by his geographical position in Rome, but I cannot think so now."

"The Vatican has thrown in its lot to a very considerable extent with Mussolini, as every well-informed person in Europe knows."

No one could express more graphically or with better insight the mutual dependence of Fascism and the Vatican than the recently deceased Cardinal Hinsley of London, when he said that "... if Fascism goes under, nothing can save the country from chaos. God's cause goes under with it."

Pius XI in a letter to Cardinal Gasparri of May 30, 1929, stated that the Catholic church in Catholic countries does not allow full liberty of religious discussion because it might "trick unenlightened minds and become a cloak for harmful propaganda." The Catholic church is also opposed to mission work of non-Catholic religions within a Catholic country. Mussolini by the Lateran Concordat bound himself to apply this Catholic doctrine of religious intolerance. This he accomplished by rewriting the Criminal Code in 1930 in such a way that it openly undertook to protect Roman Catholicism but to discriminate against all other religions. Article No. 402 of this code punished with imprisonment whoever vilifies "the religion of the State." But no provision was made to punish the vilifiers of Luther or Calvin, Protestantism or Judaism. Another law provided punishment for those who blaspheme against the "symbols or persons held in veneration by the religion of the State," but not for blasphemers of any other religion.

Signor Farinacci, General Secretary of the Fascist Party, said of Mussolini in 1926, the year negotiations for the settlement of the Roman Question started: "He cherishes the ambition of an amicable compromise with the Pope on the Roman Question in return for the moral support of the Vatican for his own foreign and internal policies in general and his Imperialistic program in particular."

Mussolini's first major attempt to extend his empire was by the rape of Ethiopia. Pius XI's cooperation lived up to expectations. He worked principally through his friend Premier Laval of France, whom he had made a Papal Count. Laval gave the Duce a free hand for this conquest, prevented the effective application of sanctions by refusing Great Britain use of French harbors and finally attempted to salvage the Italian undertaking when it was on the brink of disaster by proposing to give Italy half of Ethiopia. The Pope also got all the Latin American representatives in the League of Nations to vote against sanctions for Italy.

Osservatore Romano of August 22, 1935, reported that, on the very day the League of Nations met to consider the Fascist attack on helpless Ethiopia, 57 bishops and 19 archbishops of Italy sent to Mussolini a joint telegram which read as follows:

³*Op. cit.*, pp. 7 and 129.

⁴*The Catholic Times* of London, Oct. 18, 1935.

"Catholic Italy thanked Jesus Christ for the renewed greatness of the country made stronger by Mussolini's policy."

On October 28, 1935, Cardinal Schuster, of Milan, a personal friend and direct appointee of Pius XI, said:

"The Italian flag is at this moment bringing in triumph the Cross of Christ to Ethiopia to free the road for the emancipation of the slaves, opening it at the same time to our missionary propaganda."

"I still remember the effect I produced on a small group of Galla tribesmen . . . I dropped an aerial torpedo right in the center of them, and the group opened up like a flowering rose. It was most entertaining."

So wrote Vittorio Mussolini, son of the Fascist Dictator, describing his part in the pope-blessed conquest of Ethiopia. Cardinal-Archbishop Schuster of Milan and other bishops of Italy had proclaimed the rape of Ethiopia as a "holy war, a crusade."

Pius XI in the face of world-wide denunciation of the sadistic conquest of Ethiopia refused to say a word against it. On the contrary, he made one of his deliberately ambiguous statements that was interpreted throughout Italy to mean that it was unthinkable to consider the Ethiopian War a war of conquest. The day the Fascist troops entered Addis Ababa he hailed the successful end of the war as an accomplishment that "will initiate a true European and world-wide peace."¹ He had the great bells of St. Peter's rung to celebrate the victory and later congratulated the Queen of Italy as "Empress of Ethiopia," by sending her the famous "Golden Rose" to commemorate the event. When His Holiness Mathias, head of the Coptic Church, was arrested, shipped to Italy and imprisoned in Venice, Pius XI, "Vicar of Christ," did not even pretend to notice it.

The Vatican assistance in the plunder of Ethiopia was outdone by world-wide cooperation with Mussolini and Hitler in the overthrow of the Spanish Republic, the dress rehearsal of World War II. The plot has been well summarized by van Paassen (p. 462):

"The Vatican and the Catholic hierarchy took the side of Franco, Hitler and Mussolini against the Spanish democratic regime, invoking the pretext that Madrid was Bolshevistic and stood under the direct influence, if not under the control of Moscow. The argument was false and was denounced as such by many prominent Catholic intellectuals both in Spain and abroad, but it served the dual purpose of strengthening the cause of Fascism in the world and of masking the Roman Church's persistent opposition to democracy, scientific progress and the modern spirit in general."

The Vatican has kept faith with Mussolini up to the last minute. In June, 1940, when Mussolini stabbed prostrate France in the back, the Archbishop of Gorizia issued a Pastoral Letter declaring that Italy was being brought into the war for "the welfare of the Italian people." On June 13, 1943, while the overthrow of Mussolini grew closer the present Pope Pius XII addressed 25,000 workers from all over Italy, brought to Rome by Mussolini, pleading with them not to revolt but to continue to work devotedly. But his greatest aid to the Axis cause has been his pretended neutrality. To him apply the words that the brilliant ex-priest Alfred

Loisy of the "College de France" applied to Benedict XV in the First World War:

"No one has any right to be neutral in moral questions; and whoever pretends to be neutral in matters where justice is concerned fails to be impartial. As a matter of fact, whoever in such questions pretends to be indifferent is in reality siding with him who is in the wrong and against him who is right."

With the passing of Mussolini, the Vatican will remain faithful to the rich reactionaries who put him in power and will exert itself to prevent the restoration of democracy in Italy. But, if in spite of its efforts, democracy is restored, it will command its democratic vassal, Don Sturzo, to return to Italy to re-establish the *Popular Party* it so mercilessly dissolved when Fascism was victorious.

THE FRENCH TESTAMENT CAMPAIGN

A Church Stoned in Montreal

ROMAN Catholics often speak of charity, tolerance, and broadmindedness in districts where Protestantism is strong, but where Rome rules such words as these are forgotten. Another example of Roman Catholic intolerance has just been brought to our attention by Rev. Wm. Frey, our French-speaking missionary who is now labouring in Montreal. For several Sundays past Mr. Frey has been holding Gospel meetings in French in a Protestant Church which is situated in a predominantly French district. On the second Sunday he preached in the church, minister and congregation were greeted by a shower of stones. Roman Catholics in Toronto may go to their churches without fear of violence, having the same freedom that Protestants enjoy in the exercise of their religious rights, but in Montreal where Rome holds sway, a Protestant minister of the Gospel and the church he preaches in, are made the targets of stones. That is the only answer to the Truth of the Word, that the poor mislead Roman Catholics can give. Let us pray for Mr. Frey and his testimony in French, that even some of the dupes who were egged on to throw stones by others in higher places, will have their eyes opened, even as a certain young man who stood by when the early enemies of the Gospel stoned the first martyr to death.

Giving Out The Word

Rev. Wilfred Wellington writes from Northwestern Quebec:

"We are confident that the car which was essential for adequate visiting in Northwestern Quebec will be most serviceable. Scores of families in various parts of our field, who live miles from any town, will be able to hear the Gospel in their own homes; and we trust that there may be many conversions from among them."

"Tomorrow I begin a trip covering about two hundred miles for the visiting of several smaller towns. Demands for the Word of God have reached us from many in this territory and we must follow their desire with the preaching of the truth."

"We are at present engaged in door-to-door visiting. Several believers are taking part in this important work, among whom are two qualified converted French-Canadians, whom God has given us the privilege of leading into the Light. In one week of visitation in this town, with only a small portion of the municipality covered, already twenty-five French-Canadians requested and received the New Testament in their own language."

"There will be increased opposition but God is for us and will bless His Own Word."

¹New Times and Ethiopia News, Oct. 31, 1936.